

TENNESSEAN OP-ED: RELUCTANT 'NO' TO HOUSE BILL

Reluctant 'no' to House bill

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By U.S.
Rep. Jim Cooper

This morning, I will appear on CBS' Face the Nation to discuss health-care reform with President Barack Obama's adviser David Axelrod and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal.

I will probably be asked how I intend to vote on the House bill that is scheduled for a vote this week.

Sadly, my answer will be "no."

As Obama's campaign chairman in Tennessee, as a longtime instructor of health policy at the Owen Business School at Vanderbilt University, and as a veteran of the disappointing health-care debates of the early '90s, I am dismayed at the

prospect of voting "no."

I want to
vote for health-care reform. Every American deserves comprehensive health care.
It is a moral imperative.

But the
House bill, at least as I have closely reviewed the June 19th and later drafts,
is not good enough to earn the support of Nashville-area voters.

Bill fails
on key points

The
president said on television that he will not sign legislation that adds to the
deficit, worsens long-term budget projections, or fails to "work."
The House bill, as currently drafted, fails to meet the first two criteria
according to the Congressional Budget Office. In my judgment, it also fails the
third.

The
president is put in a terrible spot by his own Congress. He doesn't want to
make too many committee chairmen mad, so he may well feel forced to support the
House bill just to "move the process along," knowing that the
ultimate bill will be decided in the Senate.

The
question is whether I should be forced to make the same compromises as the
president, when I am more in support of the president's fundamental goals than
the powerful House committee chairmen. In other words, does passing a bad bill
yield a good result? I don't think so.

There is
time to make the legislative changes that we need. We are still on the first
drafts of reform. Congress should work during August, and we should listen to
folks back home. The president asked that legislation be completed by the end
of the year. We can and should meet the president's deadline.

Blue Dogs
share Obama's goals

My fellow
Blue Dog Democrats and I have been working overtime to get substantive changes in the bill. Washington Post columnist Steve Perlstein wrote on Friday, "We can now thank the Blue Dogs for pushing House leaders to be more aggressive in making the kind of fundamental reforms in the way health care is delivered and paid for, which experts say is the surest way to reduce waste, improve health outcomes, and put the brake on health spending."

House
leaders are making a mistake by forcing a vote on a House bill that is poorly drafted and poorly understood. We can improve the bill during August and have a bill we can be proud of by early September.

President
Obama deserves a health-care reform bill worthy of the hope and change that he promised during the campaign. Congress should work harder to give him that bill.